



OP ED

ANDREW M.G. LAW

State Director

United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development

PROMOTING BUSINESS DIVERSITY

Across our nation, the entrepreneurial spirit has generated a wave of new businesses that are helping to stimulate our rural economy, bringing new jobs and a better way of life to our rural communities. It is during this time, September 5 through September 11, 2004, as proclaimed by President George W. Bush as Minority Enterprise Development Week, that we celebrate the diversity of businesses in rural areas, and set new goals to increase economic opportunity for more families.

In rural America, increasing homeownership and new business opportunities are changing the lives of millions of Americans. These two triggers to success are cornerstones of USDA Rural Development's efforts to help increase economic freedom and security for all rural Americans, regardless of their race, ethnicity and culture.

This summer, in a speech to the National Urban League, President Bush said that America "can and will be a place of opportunity and hope for every single citizen." USDA Rural Development is committed to making that vision a reality.

Over the last year, USDA Rural Development has worked to enhance the opportunities for minority-owned businesses to expand – and for new minority-owned businesses to open. We signed a partnership with the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) that encourages the sharing of information on business financing and the availability of technical assistance, along with identifying ways to improve the delivery of rural business programs to minorities. By collaborating with the MBDA, we hope to increase the level of minority participation in USDA's many business programs.

USDA Rural Development also supports minority business development by funding cooperative agreements with historically black colleges and universities through its 1890 Land Grant Colleges and University Initiative. We have seen some tremendous results from this program:

USDA Rural Development in New Jersey has funded the first Rural Business Information Center in cooperation with the Warren County Community College, the Warren County Chamber of Commerce and Skylands Small Business Development Center. In South Jersey, USDA Rural Development provided funding to Atlantic Cape Community College to provide a business information center for that region of the state. Atlantic Cape Community College will be partnering with the Atlantic County Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Development and with local municipalities in supporting the development of small and emerging private business enterprises. The purpose of these facilities are to promote and enhance entrepreneurialship in the rural areas of the state.

Committed to the future of rural communities.

USDA Rural Development is an Equal Opportunity Lender, Provider, and Employer. Complaints of discrimination should be sent to: USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410



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The primary mission of USDA Rural Development is to promote and improve the quality of life for the more than 500,000 rural residents in the state of New Jersey who live in small communities.

Partnering with other federal agencies and public and private sector organizations is another way USDA Rural Development is working to increase the level of minority-owned businesses. We are making positive progress, but we know that our challenge is to do more and to continually raise the bar higher. We are committed to ensure that every person has an equal opportunity to share in the American Dream.

To learn more about USDA Rural Development financing and technical assistance programs, please contact any USDA Rural Development office or visit our website at www.rurdev.usda.gov/nj USDA Rural Development is committed to the future of rural communities.

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